

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

BY MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "Cross Currents," "A Mist of Error," "Her Inheritance," "A Social Success," "Kitty's Victim," "An Outstanding Debt," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"ROMAYNE, at last! By Jove, old man, we thought you were going to throw us over!"

The voice, a young man's voice, struck out, as it were, from an indescribable medley of incongruous sound. The background was formed by the lightest and most melodious dance music, produced solely from stringed instruments; lutes and guitars seemed to predominate, and the result had a character and rhythm of its own which was essentially graceful, picturesque, and Italian; against the background, a high-pitched discord compounded of every imaginable key, there clashed a very babel of tongues—the eminently unmusical voice of modern society, with all its faults of modulation and pronunciation, blended into a whole full of a character absolutely incompatible with the old-time southern harmonies with which it mingled.

The speaker's figure, as he stopped suddenly in a hurried passage across the room, stood out from a blaze of colour, light, and gorgeoussness of every description, which fell without pause or cessation into ever fresh combination, as the beautifully dressed crowd moved to and fro in its magnificent setting. And the spectacle presented to the eye was as curiously jarring, as strikingly suggestive of the ludicrous inconsistencies of dream-land, as were the sounds that saluted the ear. There was hardly a man or woman to be seen whose dress was not as faithful

a copy of the costume prevalent among the Florentine nobles under the magnificent rule of the Medici as time and money could make it. There was not a false note in the surroundings; money had been poured out like water in order that a perfect reproduction of an old Florentine palace might be achieved; and as far as art could go nothing was left to be desired. The fault lay with nature. The old Italians doubtless had their own mannerisms, possibly their own vulgarities, of carriage, gesture, and general demeanour, but theirs were not the mannerisms and vulgarities of modern "smart" society. The very perfection of every inanimate detail seemed to accentuate the discrepancy of every movement, gesture, and attitude of the life that informed it, throwing the strongly marked characteristics of the two periods thus forced into juxtaposition in an absolutely grotesque relief.

The young man who had greeted Julian exemplified in his own person all the preposterous incongruity of the whole. His dress was a marvel of correctness to the minutest detail. Its wearer's face was of the heavy, inanimate, bull-dog type; his movement as he shook hands with Julian was an exaggerated specimen of the approved affectation of the moment; his speech was clipped and drawled after the most approved model among "mashers." He was the son of the house, and there was a kind of slow excitement about his manner struggling with a nonchalant carelessness which he evidently wished to present to the world as his mental attitude of the moment. There was a note of excitement also in the medley of voices about him. The "affair" was "a huge go"—as the young man himself would have expressed it. And neither he nor

any one of his father's guests was troubled for one instant by any sense of the ludicrousness of the effect produced.

Julian had that instant entered the room and had paused on the threshold. There is perhaps no type of costume more picturesque in its magnificence than that of the Italian noble of the Middle Ages—this is perhaps the reason why it has been so extensively vulgarised—and Julian's dress was an admirable specimen of its kind, rich, graceful, and becoming. There was a subtle difference between his bearing and that of his host, though Julian's demeanour, too, was modern to the finest shade. He wore the dress well, with none of the other man's awkwardness, but on the contrary with an absolute ease and unconsciousness which implied a certain excited tension of nerve. His face was colourless and very hard; but upon the hardness there was a mask of animation and gaiety which was all-sufficient for the present occasion.

"I'm awfully sorry, dear boy!" he said now, lightly and eagerly, and with an exaggerated gesture of deprecation. "It's horribly late, I know! Give you my word I couldn't help it! By Jove, what a magnificent thing you've made of this!"

The other glanced round with a satisfaction which he tried in vain to repress.

"Not so bad, is it?" he said carelessly. "Only these fellows are such fools, even the best of them; they always blunder if they can." With this wholesale condemnation of the workmen among whom, some fifty years ago, his grandfather might have been found, he screwed his eyeglass into his eye, serenely unconscious of the comic effect produced, for the better contemplation of a pretty girl at the farther end of the room. "Lady Pamela looks awfully fit, doesn't she?" he observed parenthetically; continuing almost in the same breath: "The gardens are the best part, seems to me. Awfully like the real thing, don't you know!"

Julian's only direct answer was an expressive gesture of appreciation and apology.

"Awfully well done!" he said. "Excuse me, dear boy, I see my mother, and she'll want to know why I've not turned up before. I must go and explain."

His companion laughed; the laugh was rather derisive, and the glance he cast on Julian through his eyeglass was stupidly inquisitive and incredulous.

"What a fellow you are, Romaine!" he

said. "They ought to put you in a glass case and label you the model son."

Another gay, expressive gesture from Julian.

"Why not?" he said lightly. "We're a model pair, you know."

And the next moment he was threading his way quickly across the room. A sudden movement of the crowd had shown him his mother's figure, and he had realised instinctively that she had seen him. He came up to her with a manner, about which there was something indescribably reckless, and made her a low bow of gay and abject apology.

"I beg ten thousand million pardons!" he said. "Language fails to express my feelings."

Mrs. Romaine's dress was not a success—that is to say, it was perfect in itself, and failed only as a setting for its wearer. To deprive her appearance of any possibility of "chic" or "dash" was to deprive it of all its brilliancy. But no unsuitability of colouring or cut in her gown could have been responsible for the strained, hard look which underlay her artificial smile; or for the haggard watchfulness which had lurked in her eyes until the very instant on which Julian had entered the room. The watchfulness had disappeared, but a restless intentness remained as she turned to Julian now and struck a little attitude of mock implacability, with a light, high-pitched laugh.

"Then the conversation must be carried on in dumb show," she said, "for language also fails to express my feelings, sir. What have you to say for yourself?"

Her voice, for all its gaiety, was thin and strained.

"Please, nothing," was the mock-humility answer. "I met a fellow, and he beguiled me. He was just off to America."

He was standing with his hands folded and his eyes cast down, and he did not see—he would not have understood if he had seen—the strange flash in those hard, blue eyes—such a flash as might leap up in the eyes of a woman in the silent endurance of a swift stab of pain.

"A very poor excuse," declared Mrs. Romaine gaily. "No, I don't think I shall forgive you yet. Such unscrupulous desertion must be visited as it deserves. Don't you think so?"

Lord Garstin had come up to them, and the question was addressed to him with a light laugh as she gave him her hand.

He nodded pleasantly to Julian as he answered :

"Who has deserted? Not this boy of yours, eh?"

Mrs. Romayne laughed again, and pushed Julian playfully with her fan.

"Oh, I forgot! You don't know his wickedness, of course! Take me away from him, Lord Garstin, do, and I'll confide in you. Gorgeous affair this, isn't it? I wonder what it cost!"

Lord Garstin looked round with a rather lofty smile. There were times when it pleased him to pose as an isolated representative of a bygone age by the traditions of which, in matters of taste and breeding, the present age was utterly condemned.

"Rather too gorgeous to please an old man," he said now with a fine reserve. "These dear good people would be more to my taste, do you know, if they had a little less money. Have you been outside, by-the-bye? It's really not badly done."

Mrs. Romayne turned away with him, laughing and nodding to Julian, and then she stopped and went towards her son again, touching his shoulder lightly.

"Every one isn't so stony-hearted as I am, bad boy," she whispered gaily. "Somebody has actually kept you some dances, I believe, if you apologise properly. Look, there she is."

She made a little gesture with her fan towards the entrance to the dancing-room, from which Maud Pomeroy was just emerging, looking like a picture in a white dress of the simplest Florentine form, her long hair loose on her shoulders, and crowned with a wreath of flowers. The dance music had stopped, and the music which still filled the air came from the garden. With that hard recklessness growing stronger on his face, Julian made a slight, graceful gesture towards his mother as though he would have kissed his hand to her in gratitude, turned away, and moved rapidly over to Miss Pomeroy.

More than three hours had gone by since Julian had found himself standing alone gazing stupidly in the direction in which Clemence had disappeared, and how the first two of those hours had passed he hardly knew. He had turned abruptly away and left the little street, to walk mechanically on and on, struggling blindly in a black abyss of self-contempt, in which his love lived only as additional torture.

He had emerged gradually from that abyss, or rather his sense of its surrounding blackness had faded by degrees, as all

such acute sensations must. And so completely had that blackness walled him in, and deadened all his outward perceptions, that it was only little by little, and with a dull sense of surprise, that his material surroundings dawned on him again, and he realised that he was standing looking down into the river from the Thames Embankment. His consciousness had come back to that life and world which he believed to constitute the only practical realities; but it had brought with it that which turned all its environment to bitterness and gall. His better nature had become keenly sentient. It had become a factor in his being which must throb and wince at every movement of every other component part of that being; with which parts it had, as yet, no communication on reverse lines. It must torture him, but as yet it had no power to influence him. As he stood leaning on the parapet, staring sullenly down, counting the reflection of the lamps in the dark water beneath him in the moody vacancy of reaction, the necessities of his life began to surround him once more; he saw them all as they were, sordid and base, and yet he neither saw nor attempted to see any possibility of self-extrication. The sound of Big Ben as it struck eleven had brought back to his mind the claims upon him of that particular evening.

At eleven o'clock the carriage had been ordered to take Mrs. Romayne and her party to the dance, and a grim, cynical smile touched his set, white lips as he thought of his mother. He had broken loose, temporarily, he told himself bitterly. He must take up his part again and play the farce out.

That he should throw himself into the task recklessly, with a wild oblivion of all proportion and limitation, was the inevitable result of all that had gone before; of all the perception and all the blindness with which he was racked and baffled.

Miss Pomeroy saw him coming, and turning her face away, she produced a pretty, well-turned comment on the arrangement of the rooms for the benefit of her cavalier. The next instant Julian stood beside her, his face alight with vivacity and excitement, his whole manner instinct with eager apology.

"Don't turn your back on me," he implored gaily. "No fellow ever had such hard luck as I've had to-night. Be a great deal kinder to me than I seem to deserve, and forgive me. Please!"

Miss Pomeroy turned her head and looked at him with a serene calm on her pretty face, which seemed to relegate him to a place among inferior objects entirely indifferent to her. Her voice was perhaps a little too indifferent.

"Oh, Mr. Romayne!" she said. "You've actually appeared!"

"I have," he said. "At last! There's a poor fellow I've seen a good deal of—not one of the regular set, you know, but a thoroughly unlucky chap, always in the wars. He's just off to try his luck on the other side of the world, and I met him this evening most awfully blue and lonely—he hasn't a friend in the world. Of course I had to try and cheer him up a bit, and—there, I couldn't leave him, don't you know. I packed him into the mail train at last, and bolted here as fast as wheels could bring me."

Something of the blank serenity of Miss Pomeroy's face gave way. She lifted the feather fan that hung at her girdle and began to ruffle the feathers lightly against her other hand with lowered eyelids.

"I don't think I should have troubled to hurry as it was so late!" she said, and there was a touch of reproach and resentment in her voice. Her cavalier had drifted away by this time, and in the midst of the constantly moving stream of people she and Julian were practically alone. Julian answered her quickly with eager significance.

"You would—in my place!" he said. "You would if you had had the hope of even one of the dances to which you had been looking forward—well, I won't say how, or for how long. Was it altogether a vain hope? Am I quite too late?"

"You are very late!" was the answer; but the tone was distant and indifferent no longer; and as the sound of the violins rose softly and invitingly once more from the other room a quick question from Julian received a soft affirmative in reply, and he led her triumphantly towards the music.

The room was not too full. The garden, the supper, the "show"—as the guests called it amongst themselves—as a whole prevented any overcrowding in the dancing-room; dancing being but an every-day affair. But dancing among such cunningly arranged accessories was by no means a commonplace business. The unfamiliar picturesqueness of the room, with its softly scented air, the wonderful effects of colour and light, and above all a certain wild

passion and sweetness about the music, was not wholly without effect even on the jaded, torpid receptivity of men and women of the world.

Even Miss Pomeroy's calm was apparently not wholly proof against the intoxication; by the time the music died away there was a bright colour on her cheeks, and a bright light in her eyes. On Julian's recklessness the atmosphere and the music had had much the same effect as an excessive quantity of champagne might have had. His pale face had flushed hotly, and his eyes were glittering with excitement.

He had become aware during their last turn round the room that his mother was standing in the doorway watching them, this time with Loring in attendance; and with a feverish flash of callous defiance he so guided their movements that they came to a standstill finally close before her.

"Congratulate us!" he cried gaily, "we've beaten the record! And congratulate me individually, for I've had the most awfully glorious dance of my life! Hallo, Loring, old man!"

"I'll congratulate you both," was Mrs. Romayne's ready answer, as Loring nodded. "You both look as if you had had a good time. Wonderful show, isn't it? It isn't possible to say what it must have cost. Something appalling, of course. Maud, dear, have you come across Claudia Eden? Over there, don't you see? Isn't it outrageous?"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Julian lightly, looking in the direction indicated by a slight movement of his mother's fan, as Miss Pomeroy uttered an exclamation of pretty amazement. Conspicuous against all the magnificence about her was a girl in a kind of burlesque of an Italian contadina dress of the period, with very short skirts, very low-cut bodice, very exaggerated head-dress. She was talking and laughing with a little crowd of men; her manner was as pronounced and as unrefined as her dress; but there was about her that absolutely unconscious and impenetrable self-possession and self-assurance which stamped her as being by birth that which she was certainly not in appearance—a lady, and a very highly born lady.

"She would do anything to make a sensation," murmured Miss Pomeroy, contemplating her critically.

"But have you two seen the gardens?" went on Mrs. Romayne gaily. "No?"

Then you must simply go instantly. The most marvellous thing I ever saw! Go along at once."

With a strangely reckless and excited laugh Julian turned to Miss Pomeroy. "We must do as we are bidden, of course," he said. "Will it bore you frightfully?"

A pretty smile and the slightest possible shrug of the shoulders constituted Miss Pomeroy's answer, and they were turning away together, followed by a keen glance from Loring, when the girl in the contadina dress, passing close to them with her somewhat noisy court, intercepted their passage.

"Evening, Maud," she said in a loud, good-natured voice, which might have been delicate and high-bred if fashion had not demanded other characteristics. "Hullo, Mr. Romaine! Like my frock, Maud?"

Miss Pomeroy murmured something gracefully inaudible, and Mrs. Romaine said, with a smile:

"Most original, Lady Claudia."

A restless gleam had come into Mrs. Romaine's eyes at the momentary pause, but there was a certain satisfaction, too, in her smile as the two girls stood face to face. Maud Pomeroy certainly never appeared to greater advantage than in contrast with a pronounced type of the modern society girl. The juxtaposition seemed to bring into strong relief everything about her appearance and demeanour which was dainty, gentle, and sweet, and to throw into shade all her more negative charm. The voice, now perfectly modulated and absolutely even, made the other girl seem "quite too vulgar," as Mrs. Romaine said to herself. She echoed Mrs. Romaine's words, and added:

"How came you to think of it?"

"I thought it would score," returned the other, with a laugh. "I can't stand these people, don't you know. I thought of getting a whole lot of us to do it; it would have been no end of a joke! Then I thought that I'd keep it to myself. Ta-ta!"

And with a rough, ungraceful gesture of farewell she passed on.

"Lady Claudia's hostess would strangle her, cheerfully, with her own hands," remarked Loring placidly.

Mrs. Romaine laughed.

"So would a great many other people," she said. "But come, you two be off and see these gardens."

Julian and Miss Pomeroy moved away

as if with one consent, and Mrs. Romaine watched them as they went with such a strange intentness in her face, that she looked for the moment as though her consciousness were actually leaving her to follow the two on whom her eyes were fixed.

The idea of the whole entertainment had originated, so people said, in the fact that its giver had spent enormous sums of money in the course of the past three years on the transformation of his grounds into an Italian garden, and the scene from the terrace, as Julian and Miss Pomeroy stepped out on to it, was indeed extraordinarily effective. There was no moon, and thousands of coloured lamps, skilfully disposed, shed a picturesque, uncertain light, under which the long ilex-shaded alleys, the box hedges, the fountains, and the statues produced an illusion which was almost perfect.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Julian in the same strained, excited voice. "Capital, isn't it? It must be almost worth while to live away here in the wilds of Fulham to have a place capable of being turned into a show like this. Don't you think so?"

Miss Pomeroy did not answer immediately. Apparently, the excitement created by their dance had rather strengthened than diminished during the interval, and she was playing almost nervously with her fan. Miss Pomeroy was not a nervous person as a rule.

"I don't know," she said vaguely. "Yes, it's very pretty, isn't it? But I don't think I should much care to have a big place, do you know. I don't think places make much difference."

Her voice was low, and very prettily modulated, and Julian threw a quick sideways glance at her. Except for a flush, and a certain look in her eyes which he could not see, her face was as demure and placid as ever.

"Don't you?" he said. "You are right, of course, and I am wrong. I can imagine circumstances under which all this would be a howling wilderness to me."

He looked at her very differently this time, with his eyes recklessly eloquent. She dropped her own eyes quickly, and said softly:

"Can you?"

They had strolled down the steps as they talked, and at their right hand a picturesque little alley, with a vista of

fountain and statue against a grove of flex-trees, led away from the more open space in front of the house. Down this alley, secluded and apparently deserted, Miss Pomeroy turned, as if unconsciously, before she spoke again. Julian followed her lead with an ugly smile on his face.

Then she said in the same pretty, low voice :

"Tell me what circumstances?"

Julian laughed, and his laugh might well have been construed as a sign of extreme nervousness and agitation.

"I think not!" he said. "I might make you angry."

"You would not make me angry!"

They came to the end of the alley as she spoke; it opened out on a quaint little corner containing a fish-pond surrounded by a stone balustrade, the fountain in the middle sparkling and dancing in the gleam of the artificial moonlight which had been arranged here and there about the grounds to give the finishing touch to sundry "bits." Into this artificial moonlight Maud Pomeroy stepped, and stood leaning gracefully over the balustrade gazing down into the water, as she said in a voice just low and hesitating enough to be perfectly distinct :

"Mr. Romaine, will you tell me—did you think me very angry when you came to-night?"

"I hope you are not angry now, at least!" was the answer, spoken with eager anxiety. "But I would rather think you had been angry than believe that you were quite indifferent as to whether I came or not!"

"I am not—indifferent!" Maud Pomeroy paused. There was no colour at all in her cheeks now, and her lips were drawn together in a hard, thin line such as no one had ever seen on her face before. There was a dead silence. A sudden stillness had come over Julian's figure as he stood also leaning against the balustrade, but with his back to the water. His hand was clenched fiercely against the stone.

"I have no right to be angry with you," Maud Pomeroy went on; her voice was thin and hard as if its steadiness was the result of deliberate effort. "I have no rights at all. If I had——" She let her voice die away again with deliberate intention.

The silence that followed had something ghastly in it. At last, with his face as white as death, and keeping his eyes fixed steadily before him, Julian moved.

"You will catch cold, I'm afraid!" he said, a little hoarsely. "Shall we go in?"

Without a single word Miss Pomeroy moved also and retraced her steps up the alley. For one moment, and for one moment only, her face was no longer that of a gentle and amiable girl, but of a spiteful and vindictive woman.

IN LONDON: AND OUT OF IT.

PART I. OUT OF IT.

THE rural districts, we are told, are becoming depopulated. Country folks are turning their backs upon the country; they are pouring into the towns. Some people seem to be surprised that this should be so. One wonders if this is because these people, knowing something of the towns, know nothing of the country. Because the surprising thing really is, that any able-bodied and, legally, sane men and women should remain in the country—i.e. the rural districts—at all.

The country, as it exists in England in the present day, is not without its charms. It is beautiful, some of it, in fine weather. One may doubt if anything more hideous, more depressing, and more unclean than some of it, in bad weather, is to be found in London's most notorious slums. When men talk and write of the fresh air, and the sweetness, and the purity, and the simplicity, and the innocence, and the freedom of the country, I always wonder if their knowledge comes from theory or from practice. It is one thing to go for a week or for a month to the country in summer, in search of a holiday or in search of a change; it is another thing to live in the country, year in and year out, and to have its methods and its manners always with you. It is, also, one thing to live in a big country house and play the squire and the country gentleman; and it is, again, quite another thing to live in the village itself, cheek by jowl with the rural population, and face to face with their life and the possibilities it offers them. Just as one is apt to wish that some of the country magistrates who seem to be so fond of prescribing a course of prison to some of their poorer, and, therefore, more criminal neighbours, could have at least one good and sufficient taste of their own prescription, so one is apt to wish that some of these pundits, who theorise so glibly on the life of an agricultural labourer, could have some practical experience of what that life is like.

It is a commonplace to observe that, in the country, one scarcely gets any of those things for which the country is supposed to be famous. There is a season in which one is able to get country eggs, country milk, and country butter. But, for at least nine months of the year, if one is wise, one gets these things from town. Variety, as regards vegetables, at the best of times is limited. One district grows one sort, another district grows another. For a short time in summer, there is a plentiful supply of the simpler sorts—some month or six weeks after they have been displayed on the hawkers' barrows in town. But after that supply has once been disposed of, which is, as a rule, the case all too quickly, there are no vegetables—except potatoes—to be got in the country, either for love or money. If you tell some of the country folks, in villages within fifty miles of town, that fresh vegetables may be procured at moderate prices in London all the year round, they simply don't believe you. In nine villages out of ten, cultivated flowers—in the Londoner's sense—are, practically, non-existent. If you don't grow your own you will get none.

The country narrows all things—one's life, one's mental and moral horizons, one's comforts, one's conveniences, even one's choice of foods. If, residing in a village, circumstances compel you to eat only what is to be purchased in the neighbourhood, you will soon find that in the matter of food, as in everything else, monotony reigns supreme. You cannot eat what you want; you must eat what you can get. So far from being independent of your tradesmen, you will quickly discover that your tradesmen are independent of you. I once lived in a village in which an old man used to come round every day with milk. At least, he called it milk, and he charged full London prices for it; though I have seen at least as good milk sold as "skim milk" in town. My experience teaches me that in a country village it is very difficult to obtain pure milk. It was suggested to this old gentleman that if he could manage to time his visit a little earlier, it would be more convenient for the family breakfast hour. The old gentleman took umbrage. He said that if his time didn't suit our time, he wouldn't come at all. And he didn't. A visit of apology had to be paid before he would condescend to continue to supply the household. I know a village in which there is a single butcher. A

customer ventured to make some complaint about one of his joints. That butcher thereupon declared that he made it a rule never to have anything to do with people who found fault. And, at least on that occasion, he kept his word. He declined to serve the family of the offender with so much as half a pound of suet; and he persisted in declining. Visits had to be paid to, and joints had to be brought home from, a market-town some six or seven miles distant. Doubtless such a case is an extreme one, though not such an extreme one as those who havenot an intimate acquaintance with rural districts might imagine; but it certainly is a fact, that in the country, generally speaking, one has to pay superior prices for inferior articles—and be thankful, oftentimes, for getting those.

As for the fresh air and the sweetness of the country, I wonder how many villages there are in England which have any system of drainage. The sanitary arrangements in the big houses may, superficially, seem all right; but how about the smaller houses and the cottages? Not to dwell on such favourite subjects as foul and open cesspools, which, I suspect, are not the exception but the rule, how about an adequate supply of pure water? I am no chemist, nor have I any comparative analytical reports in front of me; but my own strong impression is that Londoners, whatever they may think to the contrary, are much better off in the matter of pure water than the generality of our villagers. I have some experience of country water, both in England and abroad. At present my water is pump water. It is of fair quality—for the country. One ought never to expect to get as good water in a village as one gets in a town. But, at the best of times, there are certain minute fragments floating about in it which one can but regard askance. In a hot season the pump runs dry; if we want water we have to beg, borrow, or steal. In a wet season—that is, after three or four rainy days—it gets so muddy that it has first to be filtered, and then boiled, and then we do with as little of it as we possibly can. Compared with some of our neighbours, it must be owned that we are fortunate. At a row of cottages, a little farther on, there is one pump for seven houses. It is always running dry. Quite apart from quality, its owners never get an adequate supply. There are constant wrangles. They regard

each other's proceedings with the pump-handle with ever watchful eyes. Most of the country round about gets its water-supply from open wells. In theory—and in poetry—the water in an open well is cool, clear, and sweet. In practice, I know that I would not drink the water out of an average well—at least, if there was any other water to be had. The average well is seldom thoroughly cleansed, and the water it contains must be reeking with impurities.

It would, of course, be absurd to suppose that nothing can be said in favour of the country as country. There are the poets, and a great cloud of similar witnesses upon the other side. And the world has observed that that skilled dialectician, Mr. St. George Mivart, has, recently even, found something to say in favour of hell—as hell. Dr. Johnson declared that the finest thing to be seen in Scotland was the high-road to England. Doubtless, if one feels that one can get out of the country whenever one pleases, and, as was the case with the phantom besiegers in Longfellow's poem, can, at one's own sweet will, fold one's tent like the Arabs and silently vanish away, one may find in the country abundant themes for the, perhaps, a trifle hackneyed, rhapsodies. But when a man is not only rooted, but chained, to the country, and has to spend in it all the days of all the years of his life, I, for my part, find myself unable to suggest many rhapsodical themes to him. You may certainly take it for granted that it is not the romantic beauty of the country which appeals to him. It is something of quite a different kind.

In a village with which I am acquainted—it is, in many respects, blessed above most other villages—there are, broadly speaking, three methods by means of which a youngster may decide to earn his daily bread; and if he desires to earn it by any other means he must go elsewhere. There is, first of all, employment at the local railway station. Although the village is only an insignificant one, the station is a somewhat important junction on the railway. It is only the more fortunate ones who get that. They have a chance not only of rising in life, but also of getting out into the great wide world beyond. I take it that every youngster worth his salt is anxious to do that. Failing the railway, there is employment to be obtained upon the neighbouring large estates, particularly as gamekeepers. The work

is thankless work. It is not well paid, though the birds, by the time that they are killed, sometimes cost somewhere in the neighbourhood of a guinea a head. It only employs a limited number of persons, and those not all the year round.

The staple industry of the neighbourhood is the third and last method by means of which, in these parts, a man may endeavour to earn his daily bread—agricultural labour. I suppose that, if you were to draw a five-mile circle, some seventy or eighty per cent. of the able-bodied male inhabitants would be found to be agricultural labourers. It is difficult for us, who are not agricultural labourers, to realise what the life of an agricultural labourer really means. It is difficult for us, even in imagination, to put ourselves in the place of such a one. Let the wise men say what they please to the contrary, in an English village it would seem that the man who becomes an agricultural labourer passes through the portal over which is inscribed the legend: "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." For the agricultural labourer there is no hope in this world. He may rank above the beasts of the field, but only just above them. Intellectually and socially he is not perceptibly better off than they are. If he is fortunate, so long as he works all day and every day, he may just be able to keep himself alive. Directly he is unable to work he comes upon the parish. The agricultural labourer's old age is crowned with the pauper's uniform. His path leads through the workhouse to the grave. His children see this more clearly than their fathers did. Is it strange that they should be seeking to escape their parents' evil fate by fleeing to the towns?

An agricultural labourer who is married and has a family never buys meat. He never tastes it unless it is given to him as a dole. He never takes a holiday. When a holiday is forced upon him it means short commons—that is, nothing to eat. The only prospect he has in life is not alone the prospect, but the certainty of getting poorer. Poorer and poorer, with the "house" in the end. If he is lucky, and the parson, and the squire, and such-like look after the parish, he will be a recipient of charity from the cradle to the grave. He will never have anything in the shape of rational amusement, neither he nor his. Were anything of that sort to come his way, he might gape, and stare, and laugh—if you can call the hooting

sound he makes laughter. But not only would he not enjoy himself; he would not understand what was meant. He is imbruted—a mere animal. That is what "Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain," in the present year of grace, has made of him. His only enjoyments are material—beer and baccy. The wise folk, who speak of improving his condition, seem disposed to begin by depriving him of those.

To talk to such an individual as this of politics is to indulge in the wildest irony. For instance, the Primrose League is abroad in the land. Smoking concerts are given, to which the agricultural labourer is especially invited, free. He is supposed to come to listen to "comic" songs judiciously mingled with political dissertations. I am no politician—Heaven forefend!—but, as the man says in the play, "it does seem to me so funny." Not long ago a "Home Rule Van" came into the neighbourhood. That was almost funnier than the Primrose League. Clever gentlemen evinced the most lively anxiety to preach what they called "Home Rule" to men who had to pay rent and bring up a family of six or seven children on twelve shillings a week.

In England, at any rate, the case of the agricultural labourer seems hopeless. What can be done for him? His employers, the farmers, are, practically, many of them, in almost as evil a plight as he is. What prospects have they? In a strictly commercial sense, few can afford to pay him the wages they are paying him now. In the district of which I am writing, a great deal of the farming is done by amateurs, rich men who farm for the fun of it. They can afford to pay for their whistle, and they do, through the nose. Their farming is done at a very heavy loss. If they were to pay more than the market rate of wages, it would come hard upon the professional farmers. And to speak to the farmers who farm for a living of paying higher wages than they do at present, one might as well speak to them of flying.

If you want the man to be above the animal, you will have to raise him above the animal, or, at any rate, give him a chance to raise himself. Destine the man to toil for his bare daily bread his whole life, and let him know that he is predestined, and what chance have you given him? He dare not cease from toil, because, like the beast of burden, who idles for a moment, he gets the whip, he starves;

or, what is the same thing, although some of the wise profess to think otherwise, he comes upon the parish. If a man is always toiling, and yet never earns more in a day than just sufficient to sustain life for that day, by degrees only the animal side of the man continues to live. The rest of the man is dead. It is a question of the survival of the fittest, the fittest, that is, for the life he leads. It may read like a hard saying, but it is a true saying, that an appreciable proportion of our rural population are animals, mere animals, just above the level of the brutes, perhaps, but only just. I do not know who is to blame for it. I do not for a moment believe that they are themselves to blame. To paraphrase the philosopher, Were it not for the mercy of Almighty God I might be as they are.

As might be expected, not seldom, they do not realise their own condition. They are incapable. One does not realise one's own ignorance till one has begun to learn. Their children, their sons and daughters, have begun to learn. They are beginning to understand that their fathers—not to speak of their mothers!—have known whips. They are beginning to realise that they, in their turns, if they are not careful, may have those whips exchanged for scorpions.

Change is the salt of life. Variety is not only charming, it is essential to health. We, who make some pretensions to education, know that this is true enough as applied to ourselves. We know that we become so weary of a place, a person, or a thing, that only change can restore our mental balance. Our own experience, that wisest of physicians, tells us that the more variety we can introduce into our daily occupations the better it will be for us. Above all, we are aware that after a certain amount of labour we need a certain amount of relaxation. We know that only to work, eat, and sleep year in and year out means, after a certain length of time, atrophy—paralysis of at least some of those functions which go to make the healthy man.

Knowing all this, and bearing it well in mind, let us consider the monotony which dogs the life of the village labourer. Let us, if we can, put ourselves in his place and endeavour to realise what we should suffer. It is no use saying that it is all a question of habit, and that, therefore, he does not suffer what we should suffer. Probably not. The old-time

agricultural labourer has become so thoroughly imbruted that, so long as he gets his beer and baccy, he feels nothing. But with his children the case is different. We are bringing them up to be more or less colourable imitations of ourselves. We are teaching them, as we are teaching our own children, that the world is a wide world. We are, in short, doing our best to awake in them that dormant sense, that miraculous something, which differentiates the man from the animal. We are opening their eyes that they may see. What is it, in their own village, that they do see?

In the answer to that question, practically, lies the kernel of the whole matter. It gives, in one word, the reason why the young blood, the new bone and sinew, of our rural districts, is hurrying into the towns. The answer to the question is, that in their own village they see nothing. Village life is still life—dead life—stagnant. It is the same yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. In a finite sense it will be the same unto all eternity. In a village one works, and eats, and sleeps—and, on those rare occasions when one gets a chance, one drinks. When you add to this, that village life is apt to mean starvation wages and the workhouse in the end, is it strange that the new generation—in a very wide sense, it is indeed a new one—is beginning to evince a desire for an enlarged horizon? My own experience causes me to doubt if there is, in any of our villages, a healthy young man or woman who is not anxious, above and before all things, "to get away," and, if you were in the place of such a one, would you like the Little Pedlington horizon to be before you, unceasingly, unintermittingly, your whole life long? Might you not as well be stuck in a hole and constrained to spend your life in it?

Why we like the country is because it is a change from the town. Wise men may shake their heads, and deplore what they are commencing to call the rural exodus, but until they can persuade the town-folk who visit the country for a change to stay there, they will not succeed in dissuading the new generation of country-folk from going for a change to town. And the man who once becomes fond of change, as an agricultural labourer is dead and done for.

One has the fear of the wise man before one's eyes, or one would be tempted to exclaim, "And a good thing too!" Agriculture is in a bad way. And especially is it in

a bad way when it compels its humbler votaries to lead the lives which they do lead—the lives of beasts of burden. It is nonsense to suggest that our young rustics may go farther and fare worse. It is a delusion—born of ignorance. It is doubtful if the inmates of our prisons are not better off than our agricultural labourers. They live easier lives, they are better housed, they do less work, they are, at least, as well fed, there is infinitely more variety in their existence. An agricultural labourer is a skilled man—hedging and ditching, ploughing, stacking, sowing, reaping, the management of cattle and of horses, are not things which can be learnt in a day. Yet there is no unskilled labourer at any other trade but agriculture whose earnings and whose position cannot favourably compare with his. What a stir there was some time ago about the status of casual labour at the docks! The casual docker is apt to be, not only of necessity, but of his own choice, a black sheep. Yet his position favourably compares with that of the agricultural labourer. He, at any rate, has known something of the "Sturm und Drang." He has tasted the wine of life—though the wine may not have been of first-rate quality. He has been, he still may be, something besides a beast of burden.

I, for my part, am conscious of strong sympathy for the man who is anxious to make the most of the life that is his. I am anxious to make the most of the life that is mine, and why should he not be the same? Were such a one, the State-educated son of an agricultural labourer, to come to me and to ask me if I would advise him to spend the whole of his life in his native village, or to go and try his luck in town, I should say, if I said anything, "Go to town." I am constitutionally unwilling to assume the responsibility of advising anybody about anything. I am strenuously of opinion that in the ordering of his own life each man should be his own adviser. But I should not hesitate on such an occasion to plump for town. For I know of my own knowledge that a man vegetates in the country; one only lives in a town. The larger the town the larger the life. It used a century or two back to be a subject for complaint in England that London had grown so big. Great disasters were foreseen to be in store because it would continue to grow and to grow. Similar prophecies are in the air to-day. We are told that dreadful things will happen because London will

persist in draining the rural districts of their population.

Well, those who live longest, perhaps, will see.

THE BARD'S SPELL.

THE Prince lay dead in the old grey hall,
That towered on Snowdon's side;
Prayer, and science, and skill had failed;
The people tore their hair and wailed,
The stern old King sate mute and grim,
The pale Queen shrank from the funeral hymn,
And by the dead boy, whose fair young face
Showed proud and sweet in Death's awful grace,
Wild wept his plighted bride.

A grey bard strode to the castle gate,
His harp from his shoulder swung.
"Show me the chamber of death," he said,
"Leave me alone with the noble dead;
Our princes to-day learn another lore
From that their fathers believed of yore;
In the name of the wisdom Merlin taught,
I bid ye let pass the aid unsought,"
And power was in his tongue.

He raised the fair girl from her knees,
He bade her seek her bower;
The heavy doors he bolted close,
And then through the great, sad, silent house
The sound of the harp rang wild and shrill—
Now sinking low to a wail of ill,
Now pealing out 'neath its master's hand,
In tones to summon or to command,
In notes as of kingly power.

At last the music changed and sank
To a sweet, weird, mystic strain,
It thrilled like love, and it yearned like prayer,
It swelled like praise through the pausing air;
And the stately parents of the dead,
The girl with her passionate tear-rain shed,
The grey old nurses and servitors all,
Heard, joining the strains that rang through the hall,

The dead man's voice again!

And from the solemn room of death,
With his great blue eyes ablaze,
The bard strode out with his harp borne high
They held their breath as he swept them by,
And dazed and white, with the life new lit
In the strong young frame so fair for it,
The boy, called back, came forth to his own,
To love and honour, to bride and throne.
Such was music in olden days!

THE BREADTOWN VIXEN.

A COMPLETE STORY.

I.

THEY were a bad lot in Breadtown, of Nevada State, and Patsy Cane was reckoned as bad as any mortal in Breadtown. She was only eighteen, but iniquity is not measured by birth certificates. Her father, Morley Cane, who kept the saloon, was simply vile. Patsy was his child. Morley Cane set the fashion in heaping odium upon his daughter. His hate of the girl was a fearful and wonderful piece of inhumanity. There was nothing criminal with which he forbore to charge her. Every one believed him, from the most

susceptible of bachelor gold-diggers to Patsy herself. Upon the whole, therefore, the girl seemed to have found her niche as bar-tender in her father's saloon. It was—from her father's testimony—impossible to shock this maiden's ears. Consequently the talk in Cane's saloon when Patsy was serving out drinks was fully as unrighteous as if Morley Cane himself had been at the bar, and nothing feminine was within a hundred yards of the house.

Externally, Patsy seemed to justify Breadtown in rating her very, very meanly. She was gaunt, cross-eyed, with flame-coloured hair, which she usually wore unkempt down her back, and was cursed with a retrousse nose which would have been coquettish in another girl, but which, in combination with Patsy's long, thin-lipped mouth and abrupt chin, seemed to put the last touch of ignominy and ugliness upon the girl. Only in her hands and feet had Patsy aught of physical comeliness. These, however, were small and shapely. With her hands she was wont to serve out drinks at fifty cents, and indiscriminate smacks; and her feet seemed quite as available for stamps of high-toned indignation and kicks as for the ordinary purposes of locomotion.

Patsy's tongue was in fit keeping with the rest of her, her environment, and the nature which had come to her as a paternal heritage. It is impossible to say anything about the qualities she owed to her mother. No one ever allowed that the girl had had a mother. She certainly did not look as if a mother's care and kisses had ever been her portion in any degree. When Morley Cane came nearest to thinking about Patsy's other parent, he had acute fits of temper which might be held to prove that the girl would have profited but little had she continued to possess two parents instead of one.

She was, according to common Breadtown opinion, the most forward young shrew and virago that the world had ever seen. As lief would she pull a man's nose—and that not in mere kittenish jest, but in earnest, which no gentleman can endure—and heap foul adjectives upon his head, as look at him. Hardly could she slide a cocktail across the counter to a customer without poisoning the drink with some distasteful remark or humiliating observation which, as often as not, if the purchaser had a conceit of himself, put her in peril of receiving the mixture in her face without any "by your leave."

In short, this girl was tolerated by Breadtown only because there seemed no help for it. There was not a great deal of civilisation in the place, but there was just enough of the spirit of it to restrain the miners and citizens from calling a town's meeting on the question of extinguishing the young woman in the least painful but the most effectual manner conceivable.

II.

SUCH was Patsy and such was Breadtown, when one afternoon the ramshackle car which brought in the mails every other day, laboriously climbed the stony water-course which was Breadtown's only road into the outer world, and dropped a passenger.

As it happened, Patsy was crossing the highway at that moment. To her, therefore, the driver shouted. She came with wrath seething upon her tongue, and doubtful only in what way to find the most fiery and nauseous exit. But the driver meanwhile had bounded from the car, and left his steaming steed to itself.

"Tell her what you want, and she'll take you along," the man had said to the stranger ere going his way.

Patsy approached, with her arms akimbo—her bony red elbows were not a pretty sight—and scrutinised this new-comer. Strangers were not often seen in Breadtown, and seldom wanted. Breadtown was, in fact, particularly anxious to keep itself to itself until the source of the dribblets of gold which it found and lived upon had been discovered for the good of the original inhabitants. That was why chance arrivals in the place never stayed long. They were taught to understand that their room was far dearer to Breadtown than their society—unless, of course, they brought with them plenty of dollars, considerable generosity, and a measure of practical knowledge, either of metallurgy or engineering.

Patsy was about to relieve her surcharged mind when this stranger, hearing her step, stretched out his hand.

"I am blind," he said. "Will you kindly guide me to Mr. Cane's saloon? I am told I can have a bed there."

"Blind!"

The girl had seen much in Breadtown that excited her anger, but this was the first time her chord of pity had been touched.

"However came you to be blind, mister?" she enquired. "And to ha' come to Breadtown, of all places!"

"It is a long story, my girl. Perhaps I'll tell it you by-and-by. But I am tired with the jolting of that car. It must have been worth seeing, the road; but I've done with seeing things."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Patsy, like one overwhelmed. "And you can't be over'n above forty!"

"I am about that, my girl, and hungry too," the stranger replied, with a smile unlike the smiles of Breadtown, which were mostly leers. "Will this Mr. Cane take me in for a day or two, do you think?"

"My sakes! and you blind! Tell you what, mister"—with quite a pathetic lowering of her voice—"if he don't you shall have my bed, an' welcome. They might take me in elsewhere, more like they mightn't; but I ain't been these years in Breadtown without finding out caves an' places."

"What fly've you got along there?" called out a woman from one of the shanties by the street-way.

The girl had much ado to suppress the retort discourteous that rose to her lips. She did it, however, and felt glad of it. But she gave the woman a look that sent her indoors with a sense of discomfort. Then she turned to the blind man.

"Come, mister," she said, with a touch of real gentleness, "take my hand, an' I guess I'll bring you there. I'm Patsy Cane. If I was any other gell, I might persuade my father to fix you up. As it is, I guess you'd better be after making your own bargain. There never was a gell so hated as me—an' yet I ain't blind."

The next instant a new sensation possessed poor Patsy. The blind stranger with the kindly manner and the alluring face—his blindness carried with it no disfigurement—had squeezed the hand she had given him. It was the soft, appealing pressure of gratitude, and it went straight to Patsy's indurated young heart.

She turned and looked at him with a puzzled but becoming light in her eyes. The soul can peep in its own beauteous way even from greenish eyes that fail to see straight before them. So it was with Patsy.

"You are very good," said the blind man.

"That," replied Patsy, with piteous positiveness, "is just the one thing I ain't, and never shall be."

By this they were at the saloon. It

was too early for it to be crowded. Most of the "boys" were out among the rocks, seeking the gold which was to give them golden lives.

"Go straight along in," whispered Patsy, as she pushed the swing-door, "an' I'll sneak round at the back an' jine the boss among the bottles."

The "boss" was among the bottles, which he had been tasting impartially for the last hour or two. The consequence was that he had reached the mellow stage of intoxication. It was a condition in which he was not wholly averse to conversation which did not drift unmistakably in the direction of his own self-interest.

To be sure, he was surprised—and he said so in his own ill-sounding, emphatic way—to be confronted by a blind man asking for quarters. But when it appeared the blind man had dollars in his pocket—though not many—the matter was soon "fixed up."

"You've to pay me five dollars every twenty-four hours for your kip and your bed; that's understood, mister, ain't it?" asked Morley Cane.

"Five dollars! It's a great deal."

"Say three, father," whispered a voice at Boss Cane's elbow.

"You've to pay me five dollars," Morley Cane repeated with adamant decision, "and then you can have a bed—and for you, you slut, you've to find your night under the wood here, for it's your room he'll have, and——"

"I don't mind that," Patsy observed.

"And you'll hev to look arter him, with vitals and that—so you know, you——"

The stranger writhed at the language that followed.

Eventually, however, the matter was arranged. The stranger was "fixed up." Patsy was to do the work which was to put five more dollars daily into her father's pocket, and as a beginning she had to lead him upstairs.

"I'm more sorry than I can say," the blind man murmured as he leaned on the girl's arm.

"That! Oh, that's nothing," whispered Patsy. "You should hear him of evenings. Anyhow, I'm real glad he didn't turn rusty and say 'no.' There ain't a man in Breadtown as I'd give up my bed for without a fuss, but I kinder like doing it for you, mister."

One more squeeze of Patsy's small hand, and their compact of friendship was sealed.

III.

IN a week this blind stranger, whose name was Williams, fell ill, and seemed likely to stay ill some little time. That would not have mattered so much if his stock of dollars had continued to hold out. But he had only a couple of hundred greenbacks in the world, which, at thirty-five a week, could not last long. Thus in the fifth week of his sojourn in the mining town he found himself in a sorry plight.

"Patsy," he said one evening this week, "what shall I do? I cannot work, to beg I am ashamed, and I have no relatives I care to apply to."

The girl said nothing very satisfactory at the moment, but a little later she stuffed a packet of notes into his hands.

"You might just as well have 'em as me," she observed. "I'm too good at bar-tending ever to run short of a place. There's a hundred and fifty of 'em. By time they're through, maybe you'll be in a better town than this."

"You are not serious, Patsy?"

"Feel 'em; smell 'em—they're good 'uns, I take my oath," said Patsy.

The blind man rested his head between his hands while his sightless eyes fastened—or seemed to fasten—upon the girl's face.

"Will you," he said, when the pause had become rather embarrassing, "put your little hand in mine?"

The girl complied with a grin that was not wholly profane.

"Whoever obtains this little hand will get a blessing from Heaven that he must indeed be a good man to deserve," said the blind man, stroking and fondling the hand.

"Tain't commonly thought so in Breadtown," Patsy ventured to demur.

"Perhaps not. I don't know what you are like in the flesh. Are your eyes blue, grey, or a sweet sympathetic brown? It doesn't matter. I don't care either what colour your hair is—it is soft enough, whatever colour it is. To me, Patsy, you are among the loveliest of your sex. I look at you, not through my eyes, but with the inner vision of the heart, which makes few mistakes."

"Mr. Williams," said Patsy, "you'd set a poor gell beside herself with humps with talk o' that kind. Say you'll take them notes, an' I'll take my hook downstairs to them cocktail-swilling pigs."

"No," replied the blind man, "I am not

bad enough for that. I should lose all my self-respect. Surely your father will give me a little grace?"

"Mr. Williams," pleaded Patsy, "if you don't pay up squarely each day he'll turn you out. There's talk about it as it is. They are such durned fools in this place."

"What do you mean? Why should they turn me out if I can pay my way?"

"I'll tell you straight. It's the best thing to do. Ever since you've come, the boys say the find of gold's got less an' less, an' I heard Mike Grady a-whispering last night as they wouldn't stand it much longer. The durned fools think it's because you've come—they're that soft. 'I guess,' one of 'em said after Mike Grady'd spoke, 'we'll hev to get rid of him if he don't cut his sticks soon.' That's gospel out of his own mouth, an' you can believe when they've thoughts like them in 'em, the doings don't stand a long way behind. Now, say you'll take them dollars. I'll be real proud of it, Mr. Williams."

"No, Patsy, I can't. I'm in Heaven's hands. I'll take my chance."

"Well, guess you know your own business best, Mr. Williams. You ain't got any friends here, which is main bad, I tell you; leastways, you've only got Patsy Cane, who ain't much."

"Patsy!"

"Yes, Mr. Williams."

"Will you kiss me?"

The girl laughed and kissed the blind man, and then went downstairs with a fair colour in her cheeks, unusual brightness in her eyes, and a mysterious elation of heart.

IV.

It was as Patsy Cane had said. The Breadtown boys were a set of superstitious, fanciful brutes for the most part, degraded below the beasts by their concentrated lust for gold, gold, nothing but gold.

No sooner was it known that the blind man, who had come to them for no specific purpose, but simply because he had been deluded thither by the mailman for the sake of his car fare, was cleaned out, than the miners resolved that he should go, willy nilly. The plea that he was sick was not worth entertaining. He had brought them bad luck. They had already a stout score against him. It should not be increased by the losses of another four-and-twenty hours.

This was the decision they came to in

the bar-room three days after Patsy's ineffectual effort to make Mr. Williams accept her dollars.

Morley Cane was as forward as the others in the matter. There was something in the personality of his guest that humbled him, and he was not a man to be humiliated with impunity.

"He takes his hook to-morrow," said Boss Cane.

"Whether or no?" suggested one of the boys.

"Why, certainly, whether or no. There ain't no City Marshal in Breadtown, as I know. Us can do as we please."

A chorus of full-flavoured oaths and phrases confirmatory of this agreeable statement followed.

Patsy, who was dispensing drinks, listened in silence, but with growing scorn of the inhabitants of Breadtown.

"It'll break our little Wenus's heart here," sneered a man who had just asked her for some rum.

The man got the rum—in the eyes.

After which there was a shindy. This ended in Morley Cane taking his daughter by the shoulders, and in the presence of the élite of Breadtown's reprobates kicking Patsy out of the room.

"Miss Cock-eye can go and keep company with Mr. Blind-eye!" shouted this amiable parent.

The girl stayed outside for several minutes with clenched fists, biting her lip and breathing furiously. Then she acted upon Boss Cane's suggestion.

When she left Mr. Williams it was with the curious words upon her tongue:

"I'd as lief die with you as live with any one else."

V.

AND that, strange to say, was her portion.

The following afternoon a determined attempt to expel the blind man from the saloon was entirely foiled by Patsy. The girl's tactics were not in themselves very heroic, but they served her turn—for the time. She had an armoury of plates and other crocks, and also a fair supply of hot water, and both hot water and plates were crashed upon the heads of the men who had proposed to ascend the steep, narrow stairs which approached Mr. Williams's room.

Of course this could not last.

Morley Cane, in a passion the like of which even Breadtown seldom saw, swore

that they should both be turned adrift into the world together; and that if they again resisted, six-shooters should be requisitioned.

Patsy heard this menace without flinching.

"Mr. Williams, can you move out?" she asked.

"Heaven knows I cannot," was the reply.

"Well, then, I'll kip on holding the fort," Patsy rejoined, with well-feigned levity.

She dissembled the danger of their position. Something of her father's desperation was in her veins.

But the fort was this time stormed, and carried, though not without difficulty. Boss Cane was among the first on the stairhead.

"You devil's kid!" he cried; "take that!"

The girl reeled, and fell, with a laugh.

"Now for the other one!" shouted Morley Cane. "They'll be a pair down below."

The man was half mad. Else he could not have butchered first his own daughter, and then an inoffensive stranger.

The deed done, a certain soberness came upon the miners. It kept to them until they had buried the two bodies in one grave. Then it departed in a carouse the like of which Breadtown had seldom seen.

CONCERNING TRUMPETS.

THE trumpet, as everybody knows, is a musical instrument of great antiquity, which has usually been held in high honour by the sons of men. According to Berlioz the quality of its tone is "noble and brilliant"; it comports with warlike ideas; with cries of fury and vengeance, with loud triumphal songs; it lends itself, he says, to the expression of grand, lofty, and energetic sentiments, and to "the majority of tragic accents." For these reasons, perhaps, it is not a success in the hands of an amateur, who seems to find a considerable difficulty in getting out of it the "noble and brilliant note," and the "tragic accents," described by the composer of "Lélio." In most ages and countries skilled performers have been regarded as an appanage of Royalty, and dignified with more or less bravery of dress. I suppose

that in Her Majesty's army nobody displays a more resplendent uniform than the trumpeters, except it be the drum-majors! So far as can be gathered from ancient records the trumpeter has always enjoyed this and other distinctions. No public ceremony seems to have been complete without his presence. In peace or war he was equally master of the situation. When the first trumpet—it was probably a ram's horn—was blown, and where, and by whom, I am unable, however, to ascertain, but on the Egyptian monuments the trumpeter is conspicuous in pageant, procession, and battle. A blare of trumpets celebrated the completion of a Pyramid, the erection of a Sphinx, or the return of a Rameses loaded with the spoils of victory. The silver strains floated far and free down the waters of the Nile. Among the Hebrews, the trumpet, whether Keron, the crooked, or Shophar, the straight, was employed on an infinite variety of occasions; but the silver trumpets with which Moses was commanded to supply the host of the Israelites were reserved for special purposes, such as the calling together of the people, the journeying of the camps, sounding the alarm of battle, and announcing the sacrifices on feast days or new moons. We all have read how at the bidding of the Hebrew trumpets the walls of Jericho fell to the ground; and their rolling echoes reverberate throughout the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament. The anniversary of the world's birthday, one of the most important of the Jewish festivals, was called the Feast of Trumpets, because trumpet-blowing was its principal occupation. Both the straight and the crooked trumpets were blown in the Temple that day; while in the highways and byways every person—even a child—was free to entertain himself and his friends, by making sweet music, like Mrs. Browning's "great god Pan"—"down in the reeds by the river."

The Greeks made abundant use of the trumpet; it rings out loud and clear in the Homeric poems. As for the "tuba" of the Romans, it peals through all their history from the days of old, when Lars Porsena of Clusium swore by "the nine gods" that the great House of Tarquin should suffer wrong no more, and sent forth his messengers, north and south, and east and west, until every "tower, and town, and cottage" had heard "the trumpet's blast," down to those gorgeous times when a Tiberius or a Domitian rolled

in his imperial chariot along the Via Appia, with lictors and guards in front of him, and his trumpeters filling the air with frequent strains of triumph. With a flourish of trumpets Nero took his seat to preside over the gladiatorial shows of the Amphitheatre. Those Roman trumpets carried their "tragic accents" from the Carpathians to the Pyrenees, from the Nile to the Thames. They were heard amidst the ruins of Carthage; they resounded beneath the lofty masses of the Pyramids. At length their strains were silenced by the louder blasts which Goth and Hun, streaming across the mountains, blew to the shame and dismay of degenerate Rome in the agony of its dying days.

The ringing sounds of trumpet or horn enliven the old mediæval romances of Charlemagne and his paladins. The reader who knows his "Marmion" will remember how the poet, when describing the lost battle of Flodden, sighs for "a blast of that dread horn on Fontarabian echoes borne." That "dread horn" was the famous horn of Roland, which, when he was sore pressed by the Saracens in the mountain-pass of Roncesvalles, he blew with a mighty breath to make known to Charlemagne his grievous strait. At the third blast it cracked in twain, and all the birds in the valley fell dead, and a great panic seized upon the turbaned host of the Paynim. Charlemagne caught its echoes at St. Jean Pied de Port, some leagues distant; but before he could carry his men-at-arms to the rescue, Roland and Oliver and their comrades had fallen beneath the rush of their myriad foes. The trumpet was, in fact, the chosen instrument of Chivalry as of Royalty. The Knight could no more dispense with its silver music than the King. It heralded the furious charges on the plains of Palestine; it announced the beginning of the feast in the "baronial halls." As for Kings, they stirred not a foot without it. When Philip of France—in "King John"—would make terms with his citizens of Angiers, he cries:

Some trumpet summon hither to the walls
These men of Angiers;

and on their coming into his presence he informs them—quite unnecessarily:

Our trumpet called you to this gentle parle.

It was to the sound of trumpets that William the Norman mustered his army on the heights of Hastings. It was to the sound of trumpets that Edward the Third

led his men across the Somme on their way to Cressy. It was to the sound of trumpets that Henry the Fifth entered the echoing streets of London on his return from victorious Agincourt. Moreover, in joust and tourney the trumpet played a conspicuous part. Thus, in "Lear," the combat between Edmund, the false, and Edgar, the real Earl of Gloucester, is preceded by three trumpet-calls: "If any man of quality or degree within the Hats of the army will maintain upon Edmund, supposed Earl of Gloucester, that he is a manifold traitor, let him appear by the third sound of the trumpet." And the trumpet sounds once—twice—thrice; then Edgar enters, armed, with a trumpet before him. In "Ivanhoe," at the great passage of arms at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, the Grand Master of the Templars assumes his seat; and when the chivalry of his order is placed around and behind him, each in his due rank, a loud and long flourish of the trumpets makes known that the Court are seated for judgement. When the Templars ride away from the lists, in a dark line of spears, from which the white mantles of the knights shine against the dusky garments of their retainers, "like the lighter-coloured edges of a sable cloud," their trumpets sound "a wild march of an Oriental character, which formed the usual signal for the Templars to advance."

We need hardly remind the reader of the trumpet-strains that stir the blood in the pages of Froissart. There is a good deal of it in all the old chroniclers and dramatists. The trumpet seems to have maintained its pre-eminence in England during the Tudor reigns. There was that in its proud music which doubtlessly suited the temper of "bluff King Hal" and "the lion-hearted Elizabeth." Afterwards it found, for military purposes, powerful rivals in the bugle, the "whistling flute," and the rattling drum; but one hears of it on many a battle-field in the Low Countries during the wars of France, Germany, Spain, and Holland.

However, on grand public occasions, and in the pomp and circumstance of Royalty, the trumpet still holds its own, and within the last century it has found its way into the orchestra; as in Gûk's "Iphigénie in Tauride," Weber's "Der Freischütz," Beethoven's "Symphony in A," and Wagner's "Lohengrin."

The dignity of the trumpet is proved by its association with certain famous personifications. Thus, one never sees

Fame, Honour, or Victory, without a trumpet. For that matter, a great many mortals are never seen without an accompaniment of the same kind, which they blow with might and main in order to catch the attention of their fellows. The trumpet, in this sense, is almost indispensable; the bigger your trumpet, the louder your fanfare, the greater will be your success. Politicians, priests, authors, actors, professors, agitators, philanthropists, all blowing their loudest in order to blow themselves into popularity, or place, or pelf, or power! There are men and women with wares to sell—their consciences, their pens, their talents—who, by persistent trumpeting, get them disposed of at their own price. The wares may be sadly damaged, but the loud advertisement confuses and overcomes the buyer. Other vendors, with better stuff to sell, get never a bid because they cannot handle their trumpets, or are too scrupulous to make use of them. Sometimes, it is true, the staple is of such excellent quality that the people crowd round to buy it even without "a flourish of trumpets."

IMAGINARY TRAVELS.

THERE are two classes of books which treat of imaginary travels, and of countries not to be found on the surface of the globe. The one describes the politics, the constitutions, the laws, manners, and customs of ideal states, with a purpose which is almost exclusively didactic, and includes such works as More's "Utopia," Campanella's "City of the Sun," Harrington's "Oceana," and similar books; while the other narrates travels of an imaginary and impossible kind, with a purpose which is generally satirical, and in this class the most pre-eminent example is Swift's immortal "Gulliver." Although the most noteworthy, it was not the first work of the kind. There were strong men before Agamemnon, and many tales of imaginary travel before Lemuel Gulliver astonished the world.

Among the earliest known works of this kind are two by a Gascon, Cyrano de Bergerac, who was born early in the seventeenth century, and who, after a short career as a soldier, turned his attention to literature, and produced two satirical books of imaginary travel under the titles of "Histoire Comique des États et Empires de la Lune," and "Histoire Comique des

États et Empires du Soleil." They became very popular both in France, where numerous editions have appeared, and in England, where a translation was published so early as 1659. One noticeable feature of these books is the way in which the writer runs counter to popular prejudices, and exalts what it was customary to decry. An instance of this may be found even in so small a matter as his attitude towards the unfortunate possessors of red hair. The prejudice against hair of this colour—Judas-haired was a frequent adjective of old, and Rosalind says of Orlando, "His very hair is of the dissembling colour"—is very ancient and general. There is an old French rhyme, which was in common use in the days of Cyrano de Bergerac, which says:

Homme roux et femme barbus
De trente pas loin le salue,
Avecques trois pierres au poing
Pour t'en aider à ton besoign.

This recommendation to salute a red-haired man or bearded woman at a distance of thirty feet, with three stones held in reserve in the fist, does not betoken a friendly feeling towards unlucky Rufuses; but Cyrano says boldly: "A brave head covered with red hair is nothing else but the sun in the midst of his rays, yet many speak ill of it, because few have the honour to be so;" and again, after saying that flaxen hair is a sign of fickleness and black of obstinacy, but the medium is between the two, he continues: "Where wisdom in favour of red-haired men hath lodged virtue, so their flesh is much more delicate, their blood more pure, their spirits more clarified, and consequently their intellect more accomplished, because of the mixture of the four qualities." Wherein is great comfort for those afflicted with fiery polls.

The moon was a favourite locality with seventeenth century writers of imaginary travels. Almost contemporaneously with Cyrano de Bergerac's books, two English journeys to the moon were published, both in 1638. The first was entitled "The Strange Voyage and Adventures of Domingo Gonzales to the World in the Moon," and was long supposed to be written by the Spaniard whose name it bore. But although not published till 1638, it was really written many years earlier, about the year 1600, by one Francis Godwin, who afterwards became in succession Bishop of Llandaff and of Hereford. The book is ingeniously written, and contains many interesting and acute speculations.

Hallam has pointed out that the writer declares positively for the Copernican system, which was uncommon at that time, and that he also had a fairly clear comprehension of the principle of gravitation, it being distinctly supposed that the earth's attraction diminishes with the distance. The mode by which Gonzales reached the moon was somewhat complicated, but his return was managed with great simplicity. The globe of the moon, he explains, possesses a certain amount of attractive power, but far less than that of the earth; so that, he continues, "if a man do but spring upwards with all his force, as dancers do when they show their activity by capering, he shall be able to mount fifty or sixty feet high, and then he is quite beyond all attraction of the moon." It is very simple; Gonzales springs accordingly, leaves the moon behind him, and reaches the earth without misadventure.

The second journey to the lunar sphere, published in 1638, was Bishop Wilkins's well-known work, the title of which explains its subject: "A Discovery of a New World; or, a discourse tending to prove that 'tis probable there may be another habitable world in the moon, with a discourse concerning the possibility of a passage thither."

Among the various novel ideas in this book are speculations as to the possibility of men being able to use wings for purposes of flight. The Bishop wrote seriously enough on this preposterous proposal of a voyage to the moon; but apart from the extravagance of this particular book, he had many claims to be considered a genuine man of science. His other writings are of a different character, and during the Commonwealth he projected an association of scientific men, such as was afterwards realized in the Royal Society of London, under the presidency of Isaac Barrow and Isaac Newton. Bishop Wilkins was also one of the first to speculate upon the possibility of an universal language.

The next book of imaginary travel was a work entitled "Gerania: A New Discovery of Little sort of People, called Pygmies, their Stature, Habits, Manners, Buildings, Knowledge, and Government," written by one Joshua Barnes, and published in 1675. This is a forerunner of Gulliver's more famous description of Lilliput. To Joshua Barnes succeeded Daniel Defoe, who, before writing possible travels and adventures in Africa, Madagascar, the Pacific, and else-

where, was bitten by the mania for speculative journeyings, and in 1692 published a "Voyage to the World of Cartesius," which he followed in 1705 with his "Consolidator, or Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon." Both books are satirical, and contain many hints of ideas afterwards developed by Swift in "Gulliver." A more extravagant production, which had no particular satirical purpose, but may be taken as an early and "curious"—in the booksellers' sense of the word—example of the Munchausen order of fiction, was published at Amsterdam in 1713, entitled "Gomgam, ou l'Homme Prodigeux transporté dans l'air, sur la terre, et sous les eaux." This was written by Laurence Bordelon, a French writer of plays and romances, who died at an advanced age at Paris in 1730. The book contains adventures which are very startling indeed, and which must be read to be believed. Five years later a small and now little known pamphlet, entitled "A Voyage to the Moon, with an account of the Religion, Laws, Customs, and Manner of Government among the Lunars, or Moonmen," was printed at Stamford. This was probably a version of part of one of the works of Cyrano de Bergerac, the Gascon satirist already mentioned.

But all these early journeys to the moon, and other outlandish regions, were in a few years thrown completely into the shade by the publication, in 1726, of the immortal "Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World," by that adventurous and veracious mariner, Captain Lemuel Gulliver. Swift's book, which is too well known to need comment, was at first issued anonymously, and it at once took the world by storm. "It was received," says Johnson, "with such avidity that the price of the first edition was raised before the second could be made; it was read by the high and low, the learned and illiterate. Criticism was for a while lost in wonder; no rules of judgement were applied to a book written in open defiance of truth and regularity." Most readers did not trouble themselves about the satire or the allegory of the work, but simply delighted in the vivid narrative, written in so simple and yet so forcible a style that the most monstrous impossibilities seemed almost to come within the bounds of the possible, and the most startling fictions wore the innocent air of indisputable facts.

Some simple souls even took the book literally. "'Gulliver' is in everybody's hands," wrote Arbuthnot to Swift, immediately after its publication. "Lord Scarborough, who is no inventor of stories, told me that he fell in company with a master of a ship, who told him that he was very well acquainted with Gulliver, but that the printer had mistaken—that he lived in Wapping, and not at Rotherhithe. I lent the book to an old gentleman, who went immediately to his map to search for Lilliput." It was soon translated into many European tongues, and became as popular abroad as it was at home. A Spanish translation was provided, with a warning to the reader, which must have been written by a humorist. This caution gravely reminded the Catholic reader that the work was written by a heretic dean, which, says the writer, accounts for the many glaring and wilful deviations from truth to be found in these travels.

The success of "Gulliver" gave rise in this country to a host of imitations, which, like most imitations, were all very markedly inferior to their model; but of these offshoots from the parent stem of Swift's work, one of the earliest was also one of the most original and successful. This was the "Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins," by Robert Paltock, which was published anonymously in 1750. It narrates the shipwreck of the said Wilkins in the neighbourhood of the South Pole, where he passes through a subterranean cavern into a new world, and there becomes acquainted with the Glumms and Gawreys, or men and women that fly, and has much wonderful information to unfold relating to these strange beings, their laws, and customs, and manners. The narrative is well written, and has been highly praised by many good judges. It has been translated into French and German; Coleridge spoke of it as a work of uncommon beauty; Leigh Hunt praises it, Southey was fond of it, and Lamb, when a boy, rejoiced in its adventurous pages. It was carefully reprinted in two convenient volumes several years ago.

A curious book of imaginary travels, which appeared a few years before "Peter Wilkins," was written in Latin by a Danish author, Baron Lewis Holberg. It contained an account of "The Subterraneous Travels of Niels Klim," and detailed that hero's journey to the world underground in a style probably modelled on "Gulliver," and

largely spiced with satire on the abuses of the Government. An English version of "Niels Klim" appeared in 1828. From this veracious narrative the reader may learn that in the world underground it is the custom of the doctors to prescribe books instead of medicine; and the author avers that he was himself cured of persistent sleeplessness by a well-chosen course of sermons.

The most popular successor to Peter Wilkins was the "Travels and Adventures of William Bingfield, Esq.," which appeared in 1753, and professed to contain "as surprising a fluctuation of circumstances as ever befel one man; with an accurate account of the shape, nature, and properties of that most furious and amazing animal the dog-bird." The book is rare and little known, for Sir Walter Scott wrote in his copy that he had long sought for one without being able to find a person who would so much as acknowledge having heard of Bingfield and his dog-birds.

The work seems to have been a favourite with Sir Walter, for he showed his copy to Southey when the latter visited him, and told him of the pleasure which it had given him. Southey was equally taken with "Peter Wilkins." All that the "Monthly Review," the chief critical magazine in 1753, could say of Bingfield's book was that it was fit for the kitchen. Many similar works seem to have had their little day of popularity; for the same review, a few years later, speaks contemptuously "of the whole tribe of the Devil Dicks, the apparitions, the Peter Wilkinsees, the John Daniels, the Dog-Birds, and all that endless train of which the teeming presses of our modern Curis have been so fruitful for some years past." The success of "Gulliver" had turned the attention of ingeniously speculative travellers away from the moon, which had formerly been the favourite goal for such voyages; but in 1765 an anonymous writer returned to the old paths, and published "A Trip to the Moon, containing an Account of the Island of Noibla, its Inhabitants, Religious and Political Customs, etc." This was appropriately said to be by "Sir Humphrey Lunatic," but the real author is unknown.

This book practically concludes the list of the older English books of imaginary travels, for except a fragment entitled, "An Additional Leaf to the Travels of Lemuel Gulliver. To be inserted in the authentic History of the Houyhnhnms,"

which appeared in the "European Magazine" of 1811, fiction of this kind appears to have been very little written, and was probably not much in demand, until the fashion was revived in France, by Jules Verne's marvellous tales of extraordinary journeyings to the moon, the centre of the earth, and other not very accessible regions. These tales have been extremely popular in England as well as abroad, although the powder of science—or what is intended for such—and the jam of miraculous adventure do not always form a very consistent whole. Our own literature of imaginary travel has been largely added to of late years by Mr. Rider Haggard and his imitators, and Mr. Haggard has truly found more marvels, and portrayed for his readers more moving scenes by river, mountain, and field in the Dark Continent, than explorer ever found or beheld, or ancient geographer, with natural love of the marvellous, ever dreamt of.

"OUTLAWED."

A SHORT SERIAL.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was six years afterwards, Mr. Brown and his daughter were returning from a voyage round the world. They were great travellers, and had visited during the past few years most of the quarters of the globe.

Hope, perhaps, was not so pretty as she had been at seventeen, but, at twenty-five, she was charming. She and her father were welcome guests wherever they went; but though they made many friends and acquaintances, they rather eschewed society as society, and were perfectly happy with each other.

Of the fashionable world Mr. Brown had a great contempt. He had despised and distrusted it ever since that dreadful day when he had been sent for to take his daughter, broken-hearted with shame, remorse, and grief, from Meadowlands. His bitterness and anger were so great that—the most generous-tempered of men as a rule—it was a long time before he would receive Mrs. Egerton's expression of regret, or accord her his forgiveness for her conduct to the girl he had trusted to her care. Even the dreadful shadow of grief which darkened her life for so many years scarcely lightened his bitterness.

In his anger he confounded all the inhabitants of the great world of rank and birth, and came to the conclusion that if that was all that could be expected from the hospitality of great families, it was better to live under the roof of an honest oil and colourman. Perhaps it was the failure of Mrs. Egerton herself that hardened him so much.

He had been so completely won over by her sweetness and graciousness that he felt that if she had failed him like this, what could be expected of the rest of her world? He deeply regretted that he had not taken Dornton's advice. As for that young man, he accepted the shortcomings of the aristocracy of birth and high breeding more philosophically, perhaps, because he had never expected so much from them.

"It's their confounded and idiotic pride!" he said. "It blinds them so completely that they actually think it is something of an honour for inferior beings to be sacrificed for them."

He had his own personal disappointment in that miserable tragedy.

It was hard enough, when, his patience rewarded at last, with every thread of the net in his hand which would encompass the punishment of Wilfred Egerton, he had only run him to earth to find him dead. Maria Jenkins, whom he had known for some years, a clever, shrewd woman, and who had come at his instigation to nurse her uncle, had kept him perfectly well informed with all that went on at Meadowlands, while he was pursuing his enquiries in London, on the matter of the Australian's death and the robbery of the bonds. He had established the identity of Lady Musgrave with that of the woman who had visited the Australian that evening, and he knew that he could bring her forward as an important witness against Wilfred Egerton. He had carefully and laboriously collected evidence which would unfailingly convict him, and through Maria Jenkins's help, had discovered, not only that Wilfred Egerton was still hiding there, but also—that very night—the entrance to his hiding-place itself. But he came a second too late, and his chance of distinguishing himself, on that occasion, at least, was gone.

Yet, when he saw the dumb, white horror in Gilbert Egerton's face, as he stood there, the slayer of his brother, when he saw the anguish of the mother, bereaved of husband and son, and the son

by so tragic a means, he felt that the gratification of success would have been considerably mitigated.

Yet there was one ray of pure, personal pleasure in the darkness of that unhappy night.

He had himself met Hope as she was leaving Meadowlands an hour before, and divining the reason of the strangeness of her conduct in walking alone in the lanes at that hour of the night, he had insisted on taking her, in spite of her indignation and remonstrances, to Eason's cottage, and putting her under the charge of Maria Jenkins. It was, indeed, the extraordinary fact of finding her out alone at that hour of the night, which had given him the final clue which led to his discovery of Wilfred Egerton's hiding-place. He had hurried back into the grounds, suspecting that Wilfred Egerton meant to escape that night, and stealthily prying round the summer-house, had discovered the open entrance. He had given Maria Jenkins strict orders not to allow Hope to return to the house, fearing she would give a warning, and Hope, feeling that resistance on her part was not only useless, but that it might lead to the betrayal of Wilfred Egerton—for she did not yet know how much he knew—had at last submitted.

She was to have met Ned Molloy a little distance from the grounds. She could only trust that, when she did not come, he would suspect the cause, and for the sake of Wilfred Egerton, make good his escape.

This actually did occur. He was staunch to his old friend to the last. He had met his death since in a poaching fray, for he was incorrigible, and in spite of Gilbert's efforts nothing could be done with him.

It was Dornton who, when the first moment's awful shock of Wilfred Egerton's death had passed off a little, and they could think of Hope, was able to reassure them and bring her back to the house.

Mr. Brown had come the next day and taken her away.

Then, indeed, black days fell on Meadowlands. Wilfred's death made the whole matter public. There was an inquest, and Gilbert stood on his trial. The verdict was that of manslaughter, Mrs. Page and Dornton giving evidence as to the provocation he had received. It was impossible to keep Hope's name out of the matter.

The affair excited a general and painful

interest, and for months Meadowlands, with its domestic tragedy, stood in the full glare of public notoriety, in which, to a certain extent, Hope shared. But there was more to come. The Egertons and their housekeeper had connived at the escape of Wilfred Egerton.

Gilbert took the brunt of it on himself. In view of the painful facts of the case a lenient sentence was passed.

Out of those dark days Gilbert Egerton came another man.

He sent in his papers and left the service. He and his mother went abroad for some time, as her health had suffered much from all that she had gone through.

Meadowlands was shut up for three years; but they had returned there, and Gilbert, still unmarried, was living there now with his mother. There had been another death in the family—that of Wilfred Egerton's luckless wife, who in her last days had no longer to complain of the pride of her husband's family. She was very delicate, and was, indeed, dying when her husband was killed. She had, in spite of his sins, loved him dearly, and after his death she gradually sank. Mrs. Egerton and Gilbert, who sought her out, were very good to her.

And Hope? To the end of her life, she would bear in her the traces of that lurid episode of passion, bitterness, and cruel awakening. With the scathing shame of that brief but dreadful notoriety; with the glamour of romance, mystery, and his personal fascination faded; with the sin and heartless selfishness of Wilfred Egerton laid bare before her eyes; with the generous faith she had borne in his possibilities for better things torn from her in the revelations of his life which were made known to her, the passion of love which he had awakened in her died out utterly. In spite of her failings, which, after all, were those of youth and ignorance, it was impossible for her to love where she could not honour. Wilfred Egerton's life, when she knew it to be what it was, was a horror to her, and in his heartless attempt at her own betrayal she saw what the love of men such as he was worth.

The shock of her awakening was so great that for a long time, physically and mentally, she was almost prostrate. And there was always with her the keen remorse roused by her treatment of her father. What she would have done during those sad and ashamed days without his

tenderness and devotion she scarcely knew. Not one word of reproach did he utter. He gathered her into his great love and forgiveness and healed her. But the love and friendship that reigned between them to-day was a beautiful thing to see.

They had travelled a great deal during the past few years, beginning their wanderings first for her own mental and physical health, and continuing them at intervals afterwards for the pleasure they found in it.

The great house at Highgate, the magnificence and largeness of which had at first depressed Mr. Brown, was now, under her rule, transformed into a home; and to-day he gave his orders to his butler and coachman with the easy conviction that he would be obeyed with alacrity.

But it was a never-dying, secret gratification to him to remember how that grey-eyed, slim little girl of his, with her simple, pretty air of the great world, had come into the midst of those grand and condescending retainers, and in a day rearranged the balance of power, and placed him at the head of his own household. It was all done so unconsciously and quietly, that the solemn butler and the stately housekeeper found themselves taking their respective positions in the establishment as naturally and simply as the kitchen-maids themselves.

"Travelling is all very well in its way, but it is nice to be home again," said Mr. Brown, as they alighted from the train at Charing Cross.

"We won't leave it again for a year," said Hope decidedly; "not even for the summer. We really must begin to check our propensities to be 'rolling stones' for morality's sake. We are the unblushing exception to the worthy proverb. We gather so much 'moss' on our travels that soon there will be no room for us at home."

Her father went off with the footman, who had come to meet them, to point out some of the luggage; and Hope, standing a little out of the crowd of hurrying passengers and porters, looked on with contented, amused eyes, at the bustle and orderly confusion of a London station.

It was a crisp, bright spring afternoon, and the sunlight had penetrated even into the smoky, murky atmosphere of the station, and with the thought of home before her life seemed even more than usually worth living; even though that home was in the unfashionable quarter of Highgate, and she expected no share in the brilliant entertainments and social

existence generally of the great world of rank and fashion assembling for the season.

She glanced indifferently at several denizens of that exclusive sphere, who, travelling by the same train, were giving orders to their maids and footmen.

Two men at that moment caught sight of her.

Gilbert Egerton and Dornton had travelled up from Dover together that afternoon. Dornton had been down there on business. An old brother officer, with whom Gilbert Egerton was staying, had needed the services of a smart detective, and on Egerton's advice had sent for Dornton. The two returned to town together. Dornton's conduct in that dark past had resulted in a friendly acquaintance between the two young men, though, as was natural, considering the difference of their positions, they rarely met.

They caught sight at the same moment of the quiet figure in its neat and smart travelling-dress. Egerton went very pale and glanced away an instant. Dornton looked steadily at her, a strange, intent expression in his eyes.

"I haven't seen her for two years," he said quietly. "She has changed, but in a way she is lovelier than she was before—don't you think so?" with a quick, searching glance into his companion's face.

"Yes. Are you going off?" in some surprise as the detective nodded to him and began to turn away.

"Yes; remember me to them if you speak to them." And he disappeared among the people leaving the platform.

"It's no use playing with fire," he said, with a grim smile on his quiet face. "And there's no chance for me, though they still live at Highgate and are not known in society. I'll stick to my work." And he went back to his life of duty with the cool endurance and pluck and self-abnegation which he brought to bear on every piece of work that passed through his hands.

Gilbert Egerton, after a moment's hesitation, went up to Hope, who at the same moment was rejoined by her father.

They all three met occasionally. The young man had lived down, in Brown's mind, the prejudice the elder man had borne against him. He had discovered that Gilbert, at least, had disapproved of throwing Hope in his brother's society, and he had learned to like and respect the young man for his own sake. He knew, too, of his love for Hope. Two years ago

he had asked her to be his wife, and Hope had refused him. He had not troubled her again, and on the few occasions they had met since, his manner had been simply perfect. They greeted each other now with the pleasant cordiality of ordinary acquaintance.

Gilbert Egerton accompanied them to their carriage. Just as they were driving off, Mr. Brown leant out of the window and asked if he were making any stay in town.

He was going back next day.

"Come out and dine with us to-night, if you have nothing better to do!" said Mr. Brown. "I don't suppose many of your friends are in town yet."

The young man accepted.

"Father—suppose there is no dinner," said Hope as they drove off; "we have been away a whole year—and there's no knowing what may have happened. Mr. Egerton would probably have had a better dinner at his club."

"He didn't seem to think so, any way," said Mr. Brown cheerfully, but with a keen desire to know what that little careless speech meant. It could not be said that he desired the match.

He had a dread that if she married and returned once more to that fashionable world in which she had once suffered, it would still weave something of its fascinating spell over her, and that their lives would drift apart. But because of this very fear, lest it should be selfishness on his part, he would do nothing to stand between her and it, and among all the men who had wished to marry her, he had seen none who pleased him better than Gilbert Egerton. The young man arrived punctually. Outwardly he had changed little. He looked older, but in manner, appearance, and slowness of movement, he might still have been the smart young Guardsman with the suspicion of dandyism, who had languidly asked Miss Brown for a dance so many years ago.

But the difference in the inner man was wide, and slowly Hope had learned to recognise it.

In some subtle way she seemed to feel it more keenly than ever to-night. The dinner was a very pleasant one. The men enjoyed it thoroughly, and Hope made a charming hostess. But there was a shadow—a kind of perplexity, pathetic in its way—which lurked in her eyes as she smiled and talked to the two men.

Mr. Brown, pleased to find his feet under his own dining-table again, for once

failed to notice the gravity. But Egerton, in the same way that she was so keenly conscious of that deepening, and widening, and softening of the qualities of his own soul, was vividly, painfully aware of that troubled excitement in her. After dinner Mr. Brown went off to his study to see into some affairs that required his immediate attention, and during his absence Hope and Egerton inspected some of the things they had brought back with them from their last travels.

Hope had a fatal propensity of buying anything—in reason—that took her fancy, and the result was attended at times with inconvenience. Their purchases were sent home as they bought them, to await their own arrival, and many repentant vows did Hope make, as she unpacked and searched for new places for her treasures, that she would not buy another single object in her next travels.

"Only half the pleasure of travelling in out-of-the-way places will be gone," she said. "Isn't this delightful, Mr. Egerton?"

She held up a bowl of great antiquity, exquisitely wrought in silver, upon which she and her father had strayed in an Eastern bazaar.

He inspected it with an air of the greatest interest.

"And it is a curious souvenir, too!" she said. "My father and I, who were the only Europeans present, were suddenly surrounded by a body of fanatics, and but for my father's coolness, and the lucky arrival on the scene a few moments later of some of our own servants, who had had news of an intended attack, things would have gone badly with us. As it was, we escaped with our bowl; but I never wish to be in such a scene again. For nights afterwards I used to dream of the fierce faces closing in round us!"

It was an ordinary scene as they stood there now discussing the workmanship of the silver bowl in the light of the standard lamp, she in her pretty pink dinner dress and he in the orthodox black and white of evening clothes.

Mr. Brown, glancing in at them unobserved through the door as he passed it in the hall, thought that it was all right, and went back again to his study to finish what he was doing.

He was always thinking of her and watching over her, and he remembered now again that she had no mother, and that sometimes a girl, self-possessed and accustomed to be her own mistress as she

might be, was glad of the shielding presence of some one who had the right to come to her help.

She seemed happy enough as she talked with bright, interested face over the silver bowl to the young man who had wanted to marry her, and whom she had refused, so he went back to finish his letter.

But the young man who had been refused, though he was showing outwardly the greatest admiration for the rare old workmanship, was finding the situation at each instant more intolerable.

If she had seemed fair and desirable to him in the old days, when he had been weighted with all the prejudices and pride of his caste, and the arrogance of a lad who had never known defeat, she seemed ten times more so now, when he had been tried by humiliations and purified by suffering from the dross that had marred what was otherwise an honest and honourable nature.

And she was more desirable. Out of that furnace of suffering she, too, had come, sweeter, stronger, wiser—a woman worthy of the best man's love. And he felt himself very far from being the best man yet. He was to prove himself the next moment how far he could fail.

As he replaced the bowl on the cabinet near her, he was driven by the tumult of feelings surging, tormenting beneath his outward semblance of an ordinary young man in ordinary evening clothes, occupied with commonplace interests of every-day life, into the first deliberate act of unchivalrous cruelty to a woman of which he had ever been guilty.

"Courage is a great thing," he said slowly. "I remember there was once a time, Miss Brown, when you believed that I ran away from the enemy and then played the hero at home."

She started as the shot told, and fell back a step, looking at him with pale face, and something piteous in her eyes.

That little speech conjured up between them the whole of that dark, sad past, which till this moment had been tacitly ignored between them. The darkness, the shame, the misery of it, swept over her again.

He would have gone that moment cheerfully straight up to the guns, if he could,

by doing so, have unsaid the speech that had brought that look into her face.

"Hope, dear——"

"Ah, you should not. It hurts still," she said, forcing a smile, but with unsteady lips. "I didn't know, in those days; I was so silly, Mr. Egerton, and have often been ashamed since."

"I'm a brute; and I really thought I was improving." He tried to smile, too, but the effort was not exactly successful; indeed, as far as his personal feelings were concerned, it was a dismal failure. "But I've made a mistake again. Only I was just mad for the moment. You see, dear," very gently, as he saw her flushing and paling, "I still care so much. I can't help it. I am afraid I shall go on caring to the end; only you shall not be troubled by it again. I only forgot myself for an instant. It was just like that time in the hospital in Egypt, when I learned first that I was knocked out of all the fun, and that as far as I was concerned the campaign was over. All the glory seemed to have died out of one's life. Of course, it was a foolish idea. And I've had a good many blows since then, and ought to have been able to know I shall get over this, too. But I'll improve by degrees," with cheerful conviction, which vanished into saddened earnestness as he saw her still looking at him with that pale, troubled face. "Dear, don't you believe me? To prove it, if you tell me, I will go away now, and never attempt to see you again."

"No, it is different in some way. I cannot tell; I don't seem to know myself. Don't ask me—yet. And then there is father. But," almost under her breath, and looking away from the light dawning in his face, "if you would wait just a little longer, and not say any more now——"

How could she ever be his wife—for his own sake? Everybody had known, his friends would still remember, how she had nearly run away with Wilfred Egerton.

"Oh! how is it you can have been so good and patient? I am not worth it, Gilbert. I can't promise anything."

But he remembered the white rose he had taken so long ago from the mail of his dead ancestor, and went away content to wait even a little longer.

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